

Information on Asbestos

Obtaining Information on Asbestos

EPA's asbestos message, most clearly enunciated in 1990 and the years since, can be stated rather simply:

Asbestos is a problem because, as a toxic substance and a known carcinogen, it can cause several serious diseases in humans. Symptoms of these diseases typically develop over a period of years following asbestos exposure.

Asbestos-containing materials (ACM) in buildings do not always pose a problem (that is, a hazard) to occupants and workers in those buildings. When can ACM become a problem? When asbestos fibers get into the air and are inhaled; that is, when there is human exposure.

Intact, undisturbed asbestos-containing materials generally do not pose a health risk. They may become hazardous and pose increased risk when they are damaged, are disturbed in some manner, or deteriorate over time and thus release asbestos fibers into building air.

EPA's asbestos program for schools (ASHERA) and its guidance for other building owners is founded on the principle of "in-place" management of ACM. This approach is designed to keep asbestos fiber levels low by teaching people to recognize asbestos-containing materials and actively manage them.

Asbestos Ban -

EPA has found that there are rather common misunderstandings about its 1989 bans on asbestos-containing materials (ACM) and products or uses. Newspaper and magazine articles, Internet information, even some currently available (but outdated) documents from the EPA and other federal agencies may contain statements about an EPA asbestos ban that are incorrect.

In fact, in 1991 the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals vacated much of the so-called "Asbestos Ban and Phaseout" rule and remanded it to the EPA. Thus, much of the original 1989 EPA ban on the U.S. manufacturing, importation, processing, or distribution in commerce of many asbestos-containing product categories was set aside and did not take effect. Six asbestos-containing product categories are still subject to the 1989 asbestos ban. However, EPA has no existing bans on most other asbestos-containing products or uses.

EPA does NOT track the manufacture, processing, or distribution in commerce of asbestos-containing products. It would be prudent for a consumer or other buyer to inquire as to the presence of asbestos in particular products.

Possible sources of that information would include inquiring of the dealer/supplier or manufacturer, refer to the product's "Material Safety Data Sheet" (MSDS), or consider having the material tested by a qualified laboratory for the presence of asbestos.

For a more detailed clarification of this situation, please refer to EPA Asbestos Materials Bans: Clarification

In general, the Agency's major asbestos regulations were promulgated under authority of the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) or under the Clean Air Act (CAA). TSCA regulations and guidance are administered and managed by the Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics (OPPT), while the CAA regulations are the responsibility of the Office of Air and Radiation (OAR). Information on EPA's asbestos regulations, interpretive documents, and guidance materials are available to the public and the regulated community through a variety of sources.

The TSCA Assistance Information Service, (202) 554-1404, provides TSCA regulation (including asbestos) information, copies of regulations, Agency guidance documents, and referrals to more specific sources of information (for example, Regional Asbestos/NESHAP Coordinators), as needed. Homeowners can obtain a copy of the pamphlet "Asbestos in the Home" from this source.

** Asbestos calls from homeowners, apartment residents, and other real estate interests; AHERA (asbestos in schools); asbestos training or accreditation; documents; asbestos products ban, importation of asbestos or asbestos waste, etc. should be directed to the TSCA Hotline, at 202-554-1404.

Or, contact the appropriate EPA Regional Asbestos Coordinator for the

state in which you live. (See Regional Contacts page.)

The Asbestos Ombudsman Clearinghouse/Hotline, (800) 368-5888 (in the Washington metropolitan area dial (202) 260-0490), provides general asbestos information to the public. Operated by EPA's Small Business Ombudsman's Office, it also assists small businesses in complying with EPA regulations.

** Asbestos calls about asbestos-related renovation or demolition in buildings other than schools; transport and disposal of asbestos waste; and other questions related to EPA's asbestos NESHAP (Clean Air Act) regulations should be directed to the EPA SBA Asbestos Ombudsman, at 1-800-368-5888 if outside Metro Washington DC; or, 202-260-0490 if "local" to the DC area.

Or, contact the appropriate EPA Regional NESHAP Coordinator for the state in which you live. (See Regional Contacts page.)

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